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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

May 2012

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, May 17, 2012, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Robert Kane, president of the Port and Harbor Commission. *Reservations are required* and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call *by noon on Wednesday, May 16*, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still several months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Wednesday, October 31, 2012, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House.



Michelangelo created this unfinished and broken *Pietà* between 1547 and 1555. It stands in the Cathedral St. Maria del Fiore in Florence, Italy. The studio model for this larger statue is the subject of following story.

A MICHELANGELO UNDER THE BED

*(Reprint of an article in the
August 1995 Historian
By Edith Back)*

Edited by
Eddie Coleman

A visit of the Vatican's Pietà by Michelangelo to the 1964 New York World's Fair was heralded as the first visit of an original sculpture by the great Italian Renaissance artist

to the United States. But, in 1947 another Michelangelo pietà, stealthily carried to protect it from thieves, was brought to this country. Its owners, the citizens of Clermont-Ferrand, France, hoped to raise money to rebuild the waterworks in their town, left devastated and destitute by World War II.

In its brief sojourn in America, the sculpture, which depicts the fallen Christ in His Mother's arms accompanied by Mary Magdalene and Nicodemus, arrived in Florida and traveled

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through Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana to its destination in Texas where it was hoped that one of a number of wealthy art patrons or museums would buy it.

Entrusted with the task of transporting the statue and finding a buyer were Wendell and Bianca Howard, friends of Katherine "Kitty" Kearny Hacker. En route from Florida to Texas, the travelers stopped at the Waveland summer home of Mrs. James Robert, sister of Mrs. Hacker. Interviewed in 1995, the late Kearny Robert, nephew of Mrs. Hacker, son of Mrs. Robert, and resident of Waveland, remembered that visit well.

"I went to dinner with my parents; my Aunt Kitty, who died in 1994 at age one hundred, was there with the Howards, her old friends. Aunt Kitty mentioned that the Howards brought with them a statue by Michelangelo that they were commissioned to sell." It was brought out from the guest room where it had spent the night in its crate under a bed. Weeks later, on its return from Texas, the statue spent another night under the same bed in the Robert home.

One may ask why the Howards were chosen for such an important task. The answer is that the citizens of Clermont-Ferrand knew and trusted the Polish-born Bianca, wife of the war-interned American Wendell Howard. She had spent most of her childhood in St. Alons, and during the war she was a Resistance Fighter with the French Underground. When Mr. How-

ard was freed after the war, the pair settled in Pensacola, Florida.

In 1947 the Howards were commissioned by the citizens of Clermont-Ferrand to bring the statue to the States and find a buyer. There was no trouble importing the Michelangelo since objects older than one hundred years enter duty free and because Wendell Howard traveled under diplomatic immunity granted for the occasion.

Continuing their journey from Florida, the Howards together with Mrs. Hacker and Mrs. Robert headed for Texas to show the statue. However the three million dollar price tag, didn't bring any buyers. Unfortunately, the sculpture was also seen by a pair of sophisticated thieves working for a dealer of stolen art works. They followed the statue from Texas back to the east, where the Michelangelo was left in the vault of a Mobile bank.

By this time the French Embassy had contacted the Howards asking that the statue be returned since Marshall Plan money was available. A courier was dispatched from Washington to fetch the statue. He went to the bank with an empty traveling case or bag, but left the bank with a full one. Rather than the statue, however, the case contained the many documents that accompanied it. The aforementioned thieves followed him and the bag, stole the bag, and hanged the courier in the basement of the hotel in which he was staying. When investigation into the death proved fruitless,

Officials declared it a suicide and closed the case. The perpetrators were never captured.

Fortunately, the statue was saved, and the Embassy sent two well-guarded couriers to retrieve it. Since then it has reposed in the cathedral at St. Alons. The story of the *pieta*, restored to the cathedral at St. Alons, France, is one of mystery and intrigue.

About thirty inches high, the sculpture of Carrara marble was a studio model for a much larger work intended for the sepulcher of Lorenzo di Medici, patron of Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence. The full-sized statue is in the Cathedral St. Maria del Fiore in Florence, but all experts agree that it is cruder than the model because it is unfinished. One theory is that dissatisfied with the work Michelangelo destroyed it only to have his students restore it. However, a number of experts have stated their belief that the model is superior to the larger statue.

Catherine di Medici, Lorenzo's granddaughter, watched Michelangelo work in the artists' studio of her grandfather. When she left for France to wed the Duke d'Orleans, later Henry II of France, Michelangelo presented her with the statue, which she installed in the private chapel of her summer palace at Clermont-Ferrand. Since the Medicis forbade the export of any work of Michelangelo, the *pieta* was smuggled out to Catherine under the robe of a Benedictine monk. For some two hundred years, the *pieta* remained in Catherine's chapel.

During the French Revolution it was hidden deep in the recesses of St. Alyre Abbey at Clermont-Ferrand. It remained there until World War II. Once Hitler's army occupied France, the statue left Clermont-Ferrand and was hidden by priests in the small village of St. Alons in northern France. Fortunately, the search for the *pieta* throughout the war by Hitler's henchmen was in vain.

SOURCE:

"Michelangelo" vertical file. Hancock County Historical Society.

Did You Know This about Hancock County?

By
Scott Bagley

Did you know that illegal whiskey making emerged as a big business in the Kiln area of Hancock County during the first decade of the twentieth century? In 1908, over ten years before

national prohibition, the Mississippi legislature enacted a statewide prohibition law. Not long after this law was passed, whiskey making emerged in the Kiln area as a rather profitable business. There was competition, however, for "spirit" minded customers in Hancock County. Louisiana was not dry and, when Mississippi took that path, a number of bars, some floating, were built across the Pearl River in Louisiana. One of the best known of the floating bars was called the *Blue Goose*, anchored across the river from Gainesville. Customers from Hancock County came on horseback, tied their horses to a tree, and made use of skiffs to cross the river for the spirited destination. There were no "to go" cups then, so saddlebags were filled for later use.

Hancock County residents living close to the railroad also made frequent "shopping" trips to New Orleans. Some were seen staggering off the train



Floating saloons in Gainesville on the Louisiana side of the Pearl River

Photo taken c. 1908 by Roy Baxter

on their return, clutching their valuable packages.

With the growing frequency of automobiles around 1915, this mode of transportation to the Pearl River was often used with parking areas developing across the river from the *Blue Goose*. A riverbank bell was used to call an oarsman to row passengers across the stream.

The Kiln area's whiskey-making operations were to lose much of their Louisiana competition with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment and the coming of national prohibition in 1920. The offshore saloons on the Pearl River became a thing of the past. A modified phrase reflecting the times was "go tell Aunt Dinah that the Blue Goose is dead."

SOURCE:

Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Publishing Corp., 1999.

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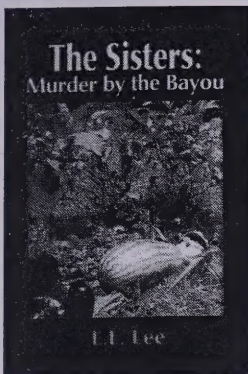
Charles Hill presents a copy of *Bay St. Louis, Mississippi: Celebrating 100 Years of Incorporation* to the Hancock County Historical Society. Executive Director Charles Gray accepts on behalf of the organization. These books are no longer in print and are quite difficult to find.



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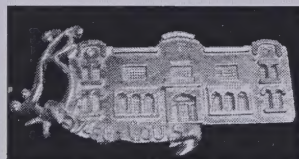
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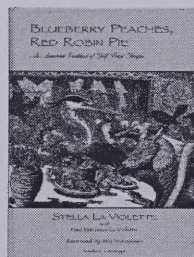
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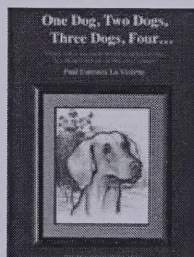
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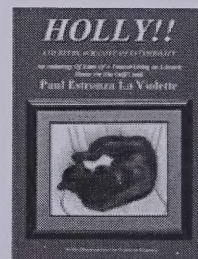
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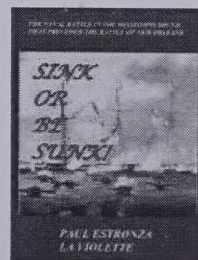
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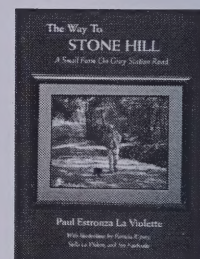
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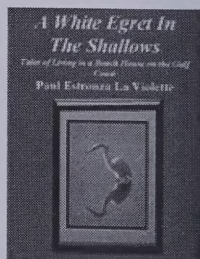
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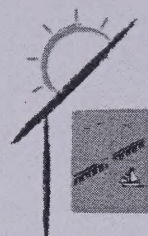
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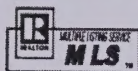
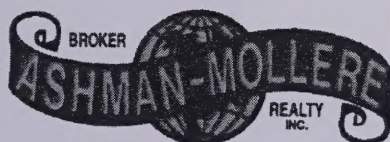
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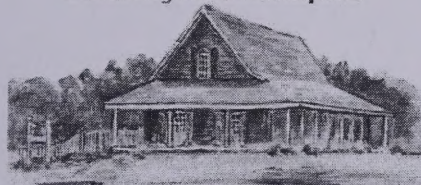
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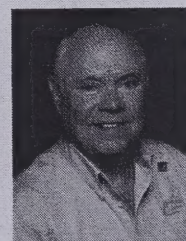
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